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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: YAR'ADUA'S NEW CABINET, MOSTLY NOT GOOD
NEWS AND FEW PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

REF: A. ABUJA 2466
[1](#)B. ABUJA 2376
[1](#)C. ABUJA 1952

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 17, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua swore in the majority of his new Cabinet, giving Nigeria a first look at the new Cabinet with portfolios now assigned. Aside from the 16 new ministers, 12 standing ministers were assigned to new portfolios (with only nine remaining in their current positions). On December 17 and 18, four new Ministers were confirmed (no portfolios yet assigned, but we understand that two or three will cover Finance and the Niger Delta). Although the reshuffle was previously billed as a removal of party hacks and replacement by skilled technocrats capable of improving the administration of the government, the net change appears to be negligible on that score. A recap with comprehensive biographical information on the December 16 ministerial slate and those named on December 17-18, with comment, with follow septel. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) At first glance the reshuffle is not impressive. Although billed by the Yar'Adua administration as being aimed at removing ineffective party hacks and replacing them with skilled technocrats, the reshuffle has in several instances simply recycled bureaucrats distinguished primarily by their lack of past accomplishments or placed technocrats with moderately good credentials in positions with portfolios far outside their area of expertise. Nigerian daily "This Day" reports that twelve of the cabinet members have either no experience in their portfolio or have never held public office. Post judges a few assignments to be solid choices -- the retention of Ojo Maduekwe in Foreign Affairs, and the placement of Babtunde Osotimehin in Health, Sam Egwu in Education, Rilwanu Lukman in Petroleum -- but others strain credulity, including Shettima Mustapha in Defense (initial impressions are not impressive) and Nuhu Way as Minister of State for Power. The resulting Cabinet appears unlikely to increase the efficiency with which the administration carries out the work of governing Nigeria and will quite possibly reinforce the worst tendencies of the Yar'Adua administration -- inaction punctuated by rumors of corruption and inappropriate access to the President by the "Katsina clique," which includes Minister of Agriculture Abba Ruma, economic advisor Taminu Yakubu, Katsina Governor Shema, and First Lady Turai Yar'Adua.

13. (C) The reported choice of Ekaette taking the Niger Delta (ND) Minister slot over the previously reported favorite, Godsdlay Orubebe, appears to reflect the preference of former President Obasanjo and appears to be a compromise candidate. Orubebe was said to be the choice of fellow Ijaws Vice President Goodluck Jonathan and Chief Edwin Clark, as well as others in the Katsina clique, such as Yakubu. While both Ekaette and Orubebe are native sons of core Delta states, to some Orubebe appeared to be the marginally better qualified man for the job, carrying no baggage from the former Presidency and having held public office recently as Minister of Special Duties and acting Minister for National Planning (even Ledum Mitee, Ogoni activist and head of the Niger Delta Technical Committee, picked Orubebe as one of the top two likely candidates for the ND Ministry -- Reftel C). We understand that Niger Delta groups are less than enthusiastic about Ekaette's appointment.

14. (C) In a December 17 sidebar with Presidential Special Advisor Prince Nwabueze Igwe, Igwe told Ambassador that lobbying for positions went on well until 4 a.m. December 16, the day of the announcement. He shared with Ambassador that Foreign Minister Maduekwe had been on the chopping block because of efforts driven by Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Prince Ogbulafor, who is also from Maduekwe's Abia State. The Ogbulafor-Maduekwe feud is long-standing as each has a high political profile in the PDP. Ogbulafor reportedly feels overshadowed in Abia politics and visibility for the state in national politics and wanted the Foreign Minister removed and replaced with his own nominee. In an

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earlier conversation between Ambassador and Kwara State Governor Saraki on December 15, Saraki said that although Maduekwe remained in place for now, he speculated that there was "pressure" to remove him, if not now then later. In addition in the case of the fiery and effective Nigerian Food and Drug Administration Czar, Dr. Doris Akunyili, the move to Ministry of Information and Communication appears more like an effort to silence her. Igwe also told Ambassador December 17, Akunyili was very disappointed with her portfolio assignment, as she expected to get the Health Ministry or something she viewed as more substantive. Akunyili has been extremely effective at pushing back on counterfeit drug issues in Nigeria. Her move to Information and Communication should be considered a loss.

15. (C) In other Cabinet news, the Senate confirmed on December 17 former Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Joseph Ufot Ekaette (reportedly destined for the position of Minister of the Niger Delta), former Imo State Governor Achike Udenwa (reportedly slated for Minister of Commerce), and Rilwan Babalola (reportedly to be named Minister of Power -- he previously was assistant to Yakubu, of Yar'Adua's Katsina inner circle). (NOTE: Godsdlay Orubebe, reported incorrectly by press on December 18 as Niger Delta Minister, will instead be Minister of State for the Niger Delta. End Note.) Press also reported, and Ambassador was told by Governor Saraki December 15, that Mansur Mukhtar, who has also been confirmed by the Senate, will fill the Minister of Finance position.

16. (C) In all, the reshuffle appears anything but impressive. A complete rundown of the new Cabinet members, including biographical information and comments, will follow septel.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos. Sanders